

European Framework for the Comprehensive Quality Assurance of European Universities

4th draft

1. Introduction

The European Universities initiative as proposed by the European Commission and endorsed by the European Council in December 2017 calls for the emergence of at least 20 European Universities by 2024 and should contribute to the establishment of a European Education Area by 2025. These European Universities are transnational alliances of higher education institutions from across the EU that share a long-term strategy, promote European values and identity, strengthen mobility of students and staff, and foster the quality, inclusiveness and competitiveness of European higher education. The European Universities are expected to have implemented by 2025 (see Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2019, p. 125-126):

- A **shared, integrated, long-term joint strategy** for education with, where possible, links to research and innovation and society at large.
- A European higher education **inter-university 'campus'** with a diverse student body following student-customised, joint and flexible curricula that foster an entrepreneurial mind-set and are based on cross-disciplinary approaches, innovative pedagogies, digital technologies, and civic engagement; with embedded mobility on all levels and at least 50% student mobility within the alliance and its associated partners.
- European knowledge-creating teams of students and academics, possibly together with researchers, businesses, regional actors and civil society actors, that address together societal and other challenges of their choice in a multi-disciplinary approach ("**challenge-based approach**").

As can be seen from these ambitious expectations and the deadline of 2025 the development of European Universities is a multi-year process that has just started. For reaching their strategic objectives the alliances should set up a joint work plan of activities supported by relevant and efficient common management structures and engaging key stakeholders (cf. Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2019, p. 127). With regard to quality assurance the call states that this "must be an embedded component to ensure that European Universities successfully deliver the expected results and achieve an impact going far beyond the impact an individual partner organisation could achieve" (Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2019, p. 130). The award criterion "quality of the proposal and implementation" entails a specific requirement with regard to the internal QA of the alliance: "the alliance has set up a quality assessment and review, which includes specific measures for evaluation of progress, processes and deliverables (for instance through the development of suitable quantitative and qualitative indicators, including the feedback from students and staff). The quality monitoring should also ensure that the implementation of the alliance is cost-efficient."

Naturally each alliance makes its own choices on the joint strategy, work plan of activities, management structures, engagement of stakeholders and also the set-up of its internal QA system. The alliances selected in the calls for the European Universities Initiative will be subject to a mid-term and final evaluation by the EACEA/European Commission to determine whether sufficient progress is made and the expectations are met. There will also probably be national external QA procedures applied once there are tangible products, e.g. joint programmes or other types of joint provision. Some of this joint provision will be quite innovative and existing QA frameworks may not be suitable to assess the quality of this provision. There is a risk that this new provision will be assessed in multiple and not suitable ways in each of the countries where the provision is offered. In systems that rely on institutional QA procedures it may be questioned whether the provision of an institution should be subject to the system's QA arrangements when a large part of its provision and educational strategy is determined collectively at the level of the alliance. If (some) European Universities develop further into separate legal entities, with supranational joint provision and possibly European degrees, this problem of external QA lagging behind the innovative development of European Universities will be exacerbated. The development of the European Framework for the Comprehensive Quality Assurance of European Universities is meant to tackle these anticipated problems with the external QA of European Universities.

The ultimate aim of the European Framework for the Comprehensive Quality Assurance of European Universities is that the alliances can be externally evaluated with one European Framework and one corresponding suitable QA

procedure instead of being subject to multiple national and European frameworks and procedures that may be conflicting, burdensome or less suitable for European Universities. As we are currently only at the start of the development process of European Universities the internal and external QA of the alliances is still a learning process. That is why the draft European Framework will be tested in pilot evaluations of four alliances. The focus of these pilot evaluations of the four alliances will be on the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance and quality enhancement mechanisms taking into account the developmental process towards achieving the evaluation criteria, rather than on the assessment of compliance to the criteria. These pilots will be evaluated and lead to further refinements and adaptations of the European Framework. In parallel an analysis and reflections by ministries, QA agencies, stakeholders, and the alliances themselves on the future development of European Universities and the legal and QA/ESG implications will take place which will influence the further development of the European Framework.

The current document takes into account the input that was given during the EUniQ's Workshop "Towards a Quality Assurance Framework for European Universities" in Rome, 23-24 October 2019, as well as comments that were received after the workshop.

2. Evaluation principles

The evaluation principles determine the scope of the investigation during the pilots and consist of the criteria and an evaluation in terms of describing the stage of development. The criteria describe what is to be expected from a fully developed European University. Reference points indicate for each of the criteria the elements that are relevant for European Universities, taking into account the terminology and expectations expressed in the call. The evaluation of the stage of development should allow to adapt these expectations to the reality of the current early stage of development of the European Universities.

2.1 Criteria

The criteria are organised around the following inter-related questions:

1. What is the European University's vision on the quality of its education and, where possible, research, innovation and service to society?
2. How will the European University realise its vision?
3. How does the European University monitor to what extent its vision is actually realised?
4. How is the European University working on improvement?
5. How is the quality of the European University's provision assured in an internationally accepted manner? (~ESG)

2.1.1 Strategy and Policies

The European University's strategy and policies enable the realisation of an inter-university 'campus' which assures, in close collaboration with internal and external stakeholders, the quality of a joint provision that responds to societal challenges.

Reference points:

- a) The joint strategy and policies of the alliance integrates a vision on the quality of its education (teaching and learning), and where possible, research, innovation and service to society, .
- b) All internal and external stakeholders, including affiliated entities and associate partners, play an active role in the development of the alliance's strategy/policies and the realisation of the inter-university campus.
- c) The alliance's strategy and policies aim at contributing to regional development and reflect the societal and other challenges that are deemed relevant by the alliance and its stakeholders (challenge-based approach).
- d) The quality assurance policies for the joint provision of the alliance are aligned with Part 1, and where relevant Part 2, of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015).

2.1.2 Policy Implementation

The European University takes adequate measures to implement its strategy and policies in an effective manner and to enhance the quality of its education, and where possible, research, innovation and service to society.

Reference points:

- a) The alliance has set specific, relevant and attainable objectives relating to the quality of its education, and where possible, research, innovation and service to society .
- b) The alliance has allocated sustainable resources to achieve the objectives.
- c) The alliance is supported by relevant and efficient common management structures with a clear distribution of responsibilities and tasks, demonstrating the financial, structural and organisational commitment at highest institutional level while giving staff and students the opportunity to be part of the co-creation of the alliance.
- d) The alliance demonstrates effective involvement with key stakeholders and the local community to foster societal engagement, diversity and inclusiveness of students and staff, as well as their entrepreneurial key competences.

2.1.3 Evaluation and Monitoring

The European University guarantees the effectiveness of its policy implementation for the benefit of the quality of education, and where possible research, innovation and service to society, by organising appropriate evaluation and quality monitoring systems.

Reference points:

- a) The alliance has developed an evaluation and monitoring system that includes specific measures for the evaluation of progress, processes, deliverables and cost-efficiency of the alliance, and provides relevant information pertaining to all policy domains.
- b) The scope of the evaluation and monitoring system includes the application of innovative pedagogical models; the links between education and research and innovation (e.g. how research results and innovation feeds back into education); and, the measurement of the levels of all types of students', staff' and researchers' mobility (including where relevant mobility to and from organisations other than higher education institutions).
- c) The system of regular internal and external evaluations ties in with the management model pursued and is characterised by an active role of students, staff, alumni, the professional field, and external, independent experts.
- d) The alliance monitors whether enhanced cooperation is sustained across different levels and areas of activity, building on complementary strengths and synergetic effects of the alliance's network.

2.1.4 Improvement Policy

The European University takes measures to improve the realisation of its policy objectives and the sustainability of the alliance.

Reference points:

- a) The alliance pursues an active improvement policy based on the outcomes of its evaluations, thereby demonstrating its ability to innovate and adapt in order to improve.
- b) The alliance demonstrates its capability for long-term sustainability, outlining how each member of the alliance will contribute to its sustainability and reducing existing (administrative) obstacles.
- c) The alliance shares its outputs and good practices with a wide range of stakeholders.
- d) The improvement policy pursued by the alliance fosters a quality culture, in which all those involved contribute to innovation and to continuous quality improvement of education with, where possible, links to research, innovation and service to society.

2.2 Stage of development

The panel will make an evaluation with regard to the stage of development of the European University and its internal QA system. The panel will describe for each criterion which aspects still need to be developed by the alliance, what has started to be developed, what is partially developed and what is already developed. Furthermore, the panel will make recommendations on how further developments and quality enhancement may be realised. In doing so the panel will respect the timeline of development and appreciate the choices made and the approaches taken by the alliance, and aim to contribute to quality enhancement in a good spirit of critical friends.

The evaluation findings and recommendations focus on how the strengths of the internal quality assurance set-up and its possible further development can contribute to the successful realisation of the alliances' strategy and the sustainability of the alliance, and not on the success of this strategy and the alliance as such.

3. Evaluation procedure

3.1 Information provided to the panel

The information provided to the panel should demonstrate the stage of development of the European University in view of the criteria. It is also important that the panel receives any documents it may need in order to appreciate the context in which the European University operates. Specifically, the following information should be provided to the panel:

- The project proposal
- Mission statement
- Strategic and policy documents
- The partnership agreement (if available)
- Joint work plan of activities and road map
- Quality assurance policies/manual/documents.

In addition, the European University is given the possibility to make a short appreciative self-evaluation of the actual developmental stage of each criterion and, optionally, the underlying reference points.

The alliance should have the opportunity to deliver an as complete and as actual as possible view on their state of development by the time of the site visit in the most efficient and least time-consuming way.

3.2 Composition of the evaluation panel

The size of the panel in the pilot evaluations is restricted by the financial and other requirements of the EUniQ project. The EUniQ Roadmap Group (consisting of the eight QA agencies that coordinate the pilots and three European stakeholders organisations) appoints the panel that will conduct the evaluation. The agencies confer with the European University when convening a panel. The agencies should ensure the impartiality of the experts and observe fairness towards the applying European University. The European University has the right to veto an expert for their evaluation (e.g. because of conflict of interest).

An evaluation panel consists of three members, including a student, and is supported by two process coordinators (one from each coordinating quality assurance agency). The process coordinators are not formally part of the panel but have an advisory role on the quality assurance processes of the alliances. The process coordinators are responsible for taking the minutes of all meetings and for writing the draft evaluation report based on the findings and recommendations of the panel.

The panel must be highly competent. To this end, the panel as a group combines the following types of expertise:

- Educational expertise (including knowledge on flexible curricula);
- Research expertise;
- Expertise regarding innovation and service to society;
- Senior experience with managing university networks;
- Senior university management experience;
- Student-related expertise;
- Internationalisation expertise and international experience (knowledge of some of the national higher education systems of the alliance is desirable);
- Quality assurance expertise;
- Experience with e-learning and digitisation.

The experts and the process coordinators of the agencies shall participate in a one-day training on the evaluation activities, the specific roles of experts and process coordinators, and the expectations for the evaluation of European Universities.

3.3 Site visit

There will be a one full day site visit at one location of the European University. The location will be agreed with the alliances. The choice of location should allow maximum possibilities for involving the partners and stakeholders of the alliance in the interviews, preferably in person or if necessary through videoconferencing.

The alliance will appoint a contact person who shall communicate with the two process coordinators of the agencies on the arrangements and specific programme for the site visit. The site visit should enable the panel to discuss the European University's development in view of the evaluation criteria. The site visit should therefore include discussions with representatives of all (associate) partners in the alliance and in particular the management, the staff, the students, the professional field and other relevant stakeholders. A template for the programme of the site visit will be shared with the alliance and the details regarding the interviews will be proposed by the alliance and then agreed with the panel.

3.4 Evaluation report

The evaluation panel should prepare a report that contains relevant findings, an analysis and the conclusions with regard to the criteria. The report should also contain recommendations for the further development of the European University. Recommendations should always be made with respect for the context and choices of the alliances. The report will be written in English.

Thus, an important benefit for the European Universities participating in the pilots is that the views and advice of the external independent experts can assist the European Universities in setting up their internal QA systems.

The European University should have the opportunity to review the draft version of the evaluation report with regard to the correction of factual errors. The report is finalised by the panel and approved by the agencies. The full report of the panel will remain confidential. A summary of the panel report will be published on the EUniQ project website after the consent of the evaluated alliance.